

Corruption, Patronage and Competitive Authoritarianism
in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Introduction

In 2007 Andre Kasongo Ilunga was appointed Minister for Foreign Trade in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Soon after, the Congolese administration was shaken by the revelation that Ilunga was a fictitious person. Under government regulations, a party must propose at least two candidates for any ministerial role. The leader of a minor political party, Honorius Kisimba Ngoy, had put forward Ilunga as a dummy candidate in order to improve his own application. This plan backfired when Ilunga was offered the position. The Prime Minister had bestowed one of the most senior positions in the administration to a person who he had never met, and who did not exist.¹

The appointment of Ilunga indicates that despite the free and fair elections held in 2006, opaque procedures and patronage networks rather than democratic institutions based on the rule of law continue to characterise the current regime. The incident suggests that while the Congolese political system is not purely authoritarian in nature, it also does not meet the minimal standards for liberal democracy. By analysing four important arenas of democratic contestation, the judiciary, legislature, electoral arena and media, this paper argues that the Kabila regime can be classified as competitive authoritarian: a regime subtype in which meaningful competition for power exists, but the political playing field is so heavily tilted in favour of incumbents that it cannot be considered democratic.²

The central contention of this paper is that the regime under President Joseph Kabila is vulnerable to authoritarian drift within the conceptual bounds of competitive authoritarianism. The current regime has not incorporated the well-established Congolese democratic movement. Rather, this post-conflict democratisation is based on the interaction between politically conditional foreign aid and the complex patronage networks that underpin the regime. This paper will further this hypothesis by exploring the possible effect of increased politically unconditional Chinese investment *vis-à-vis* a decrease in foreign aid from western donors.

The paper will be organised as follows: it begins by establishing the theoretical framework of regime analysis with an emphasis on the competitive authoritarian subtype; secondly, by examining the four arenas of democratic contestation it argues that the Kabila regime meets the conditions for competitive authoritarianism; thirdly this paper will explore the domestic and international pressures behind both democratic and authoritarian elements of the regime drawing attention to the role of corruption and patronage networks; before finally arguing that a rise in Chinese investment will push the regime in a more authoritarian direction, particularly if there is also a decrease in politically conditional foreign aid.

¹ Africa Research Bulletin, 'Government Appointments, DR Congo: Imaginary Minister', *African Research Bulletin: Political, Social and Cultural Series*, 44 (2):16965, March 2007, p.16965

² Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, 'International Linkage and Democratisation', *Journal of Democracy*, 16 (3): 20-34, July 2005, p.20

Post-Conflict Democratisation

During late 1980s and early 1990s there was a proliferation of states experimenting with democratic rule in what Samuel Huntington has termed the ‘third wave of democracy’.³ More than a decade later, the most impressive growth has not been of democratic regimes but rather of pseudo-democracies in which elections and democratic institutions mask authoritarian elements.

In democratic discourse there has been a proliferation in labels applied to pseudo-democratic hybrid-regime forms.⁴ While these subtypes are often broadly defined and tend to gloss over important regime features, the competitive authoritarian regime form presented by Levitsky and Way is conceptually precise. Competitive authoritarian regimes are defined as “civilian regimes in which democratic institutions exist and permit meaningful competition for power, but where the political playing field is so heavily tilted in favour of incumbents that the regime cannot be labelled democratic.”⁵

Modern democracies meet the following criteria: the legislature and executive are chosen through free and fair elections; virtually all adults have the right to vote; political rights including the freedom of the press and freedom to criticise the government without reprisals are protected; and elected leaders are given real authority to govern. Furthermore, while these criteria may be violated in democratic regimes, these violations are not broad or systemic enough to undermine democratic competition. While in competitive authoritarian regimes these criteria may be met, but they are violated with such regularity and to such a degree that the regime cannot be considered a modern democracy.⁶

Levitsky and Way have characterised competitive authoritarian regimes as follows:

Although elections are regularly held and are generally free of massive fraud, incumbents routinely abuse state resources, deny the opposition adequate media coverage, harass opposition candidates and their supporters, and in some cases manipulate electoral results. Journalists, opposition politicians, and other government critics may be spied on, threatened, harassed, or arrested. Members of the opposition may be jailed, exiled, or—less frequently—even assaulted or murdered.⁷

In competitive authoritarian regimes, arenas of democratic contestation exist through which the opposition can periodically challenge, weaken and in some cases overthrow the leadership. The leadership must balance the politically costly repression of opposition, and the tolerance of oppositional challenges which may result in a loss of

³ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991

⁴ For example see Fareed Zakaria, ‘The Rise of Illiberal Democracy’, *Foreign Affairs*, 76 (6): 22-44, 1997; Paul Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes: Theory, Government and Politics*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000; Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, ‘The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism: Elections Without Democracy’, *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (2): 51-65, April 2002.

⁵ Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, ‘International Linkage and Democratisation’, *Journal of Democracy*, 16 (3): 20-34, July 2005, p.20

⁶ Levitsky and Way, ‘The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism’, p.53

⁷ Levitsky and Way, ‘The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism’, p.53

power.⁸ Levitsky and Way identify four such arenas of particular importance: the electoral arena, the legislature, the judiciary and the media.⁹ This paper will now examine how these four arenas have fared in post-conflict DRC. This will then be used to evaluate the performance of Congolese democracy.

Electoral Arena

On 18 December 2005 the DRC adopted a 229 article constitution rooted in political liberalism. The constitution reaffirmed universal suffrage and established a roadmap for multiparty elections by 2006. The constitution also reduced the minimum age of presidential candidates from 35 to 30 so as not to exclude the then 33 year old Kabila.¹⁰

Approximately eighteen million people across the country turned out on 30 July 2006 to vote. Of the 500 seats in the National Assembly Kabila's Party of the People for Reconstruction won 111, the main opposition contender Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombe's Movement for the Liberation of Congo won 64 and Antoine Gizenga's Unified Lumumbist Party won 34; the remainder was split between 67 smaller parties.¹¹ The Alliance for Presidential Majority, composed of those parties loyal to Kabila and Gizenga, formed government. The presidential elections were also highly competitive with none of the 33 presidential candidates winning an outright victory; Kabila won the second-round runoff on 20 August 2006 with 58 percent of the vote.¹² Administered by an independent electoral commission established by the transition government, the elections were declared to be free and fair.¹³

Media

Intense electoral competition was facilitated by a relatively independent media. While most media outlets were biased in their depiction of parties and candidates, in a number of cases resorting to personal attacks. Of the 119 radio stations, 52 television stations and 179 newspapers operating in the DRC hardly any were neutral, with a majority owned by presidential candidates.¹⁴ Yet no party or candidate had a monopoly over the media.

While the elections were generally peaceful, the afternoon of the presidential runoff saw an outbreak of violence between Bemba's militia and Kabila's Presidential Guard. The violence was triggered by the broadcast of media reports critical of Kabila by a television station linked to Bemba, these reports attacked Kabila personally and

⁸ Levitsky and Way, 'The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism', p.59

⁹ Levitsky and Way, 'The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism', 2002, p.54

¹⁰ Government of the DRC. 'Expose Des Motifs: De l'Organisation et de l'Exercice de Pouvoir', *Constitution de la République Démocratique du Congo*, 2005, <http://confinder.richmond.edu/admin/docs/DRCongoDraft2005.pdf>, [Accessed: 15/05/2008], p.5

¹¹ Herbert F. Weiss, 'Voting for Change in the DRC', *Journal of Democracy*, 18 (2): 138-151, April 2007, p.138

¹² Africa Research Bulletin, 'Democratic Republic of the Congo: Kabila Wins', *African Research Bulletin: Political, Social and Cultural Series*, 43 (1):16847-16849, November 2006, p.16847

¹³ Thomas L. Diamond, 'Thinking About Hybrid Regimes', *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (2): 21-35, April 2002, p.28

¹⁴ International Crisis Group, 'Securing Congo's Elections: Lessons from the Kinshasa Showdown', *Policy Briefing: Africa*, 42, 2/10/2006, p.5

accused him of electoral fraud.¹⁵ Kabila gave orders to close down the stations. The confrontation that ensued left 23 people dead and 43 wounded.¹⁶

In power, the Kabila government has applied subtle pressure to curb the constitutionally embedded freedom of expression and freedom of press upon which Congolese media independence is built. In one case the editor of privately-owned *Le Moniteur*, Rigobert Kakwala Kash, was sentenced to eleven months in prison after a court found him guilty of libelling, insulting and spreading false rumours about a provincial governor.¹⁷ The Paris-based media watchdog *Reporters sans Frontieres* described the verdict as a deterrent to press freedom.¹⁸

Legislature

In the lead-up to the elections there was a massive proliferation in political parties, with 267 registered parties standing.¹⁹ Almost all of the small parties were established to promote the interests of an individual rather than standing on a platform of collective benefit;²⁰ only the *Parti Lumumbiste Unife* had something approaching ideology based on the radical nationalism of Patrice Lumumba.²¹

Key opposition figures including Bemba have used their position to criticise government policy, particularly its poor human rights record. The government repression of these challenges is widespread and has included intimidation, illegal detention and, in one widely reported case, murder.²² In 2007, Bemba told BBC reporter John James that “without necessarily seeking to eliminate me physically, the authorities are preventing my return.”²³

Judiciary

In the Mobutu period, the judiciary functioned at the pleasure of the executive when it functioned at all.²⁴ This situation has not changed significantly under the current administration. An audit of the judicial system in 2004 found that only twenty percent of the population had access to the formal justice system.²⁵ Due to historical neglect, the infrastructure of the judicial system has collapsed; judges and other legal practitioners lack resources including basic legal texts. Despite these obvious

¹⁵ International Crisis Group, ‘Securing Congo’s Elections’, p.5

¹⁶ Agence France Presse, ‘23 Killed in DRC Violence’, *Agence France Presse*, 24/08/2006, http://www.news24.com/News24/Africa/News/0,,2-11-1447_1988071,00.html, [Accessed: 15/06/2008], p.1

¹⁷ Africa Research Bulletin, ‘Democratic Republic of the Congo: Deal with Rebel General’, *African Research Bulletin: Political, Social and Cultural Series*, 44 (1):16957, March 2007, p.16957

¹⁸ Africa Research Bulletin, ‘Democratic Republic of the Congo: Peace Pledge’, *African Research Bulletin: Political, Social and Cultural Series*, 43 (12):16901-16903, January 2007, p. 16901

¹⁹ Weiss, ‘Voting for Change in the DRC’, p.138

²⁰ Africa Confidential, ‘Congo Kinshasa: Congo Kinshasa’s Cumbersome Experiment’, *Africa Confidential*, 48 (10): 1, 2007, p.1

²¹ Africa Confidential, ‘Congo Kinshasa’s Cumbersome Experiment’, p.1

²² For example the murder of human rights defender and journalist Serge Maheshe. Women human rights defenders are also reportedly subjected to targeted rapes and threats of rape/sexual violence against themselves and their children. MONUC, Interviews with civil society representatives, MONUC officials, Kinshasa, Kisangani, Goma, Bunia, 2007/2008.

²³ John James, ‘DR Congo’s Bemba to Stay Abroad’, *BBC News*, 10/06/2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6738427.stm>, [Accessed: 25/05/2008], p.1

²⁴ Tyrone Savage, ‘In the Quest of a Sustainable Justice: Transitional Justice and Human Security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’, *ISS Paper*, 130, November 2006, p.6

²⁵ Savage, ‘In the Quest of a Sustainable Justice’, p.6

deficiencies, Kabila has routinely failed to show a commitment to rebuilding a strong and independent judicial system. In 2004 the administration devoted a mere 0.6 percent of the total budget to the needs of the judicial system.²⁶

The Competitive Authoritarian Republic of the Congo

Have the legislature, judiciary, media and electoral arena fostered democratic contestation in the DRC? Are formal democratic institutions the principle means of obtaining and exercising political authority? Or has Kabila violated these rules to such an extent that the regime does not meet the minimum standards for modern democracy? This paper will now seek to answer these questions and in doing so establish whether the Kabila regime can be classified as democratic, authoritarian or competitive authoritarian.

A casual glance at the electoral period shows that the Kabila government is not purely authoritarian. The presence of competition is evident in the intensive campaigning between political parties and the contested nature of the results: Kabila did not win an outright majority, let alone the 70 percent that Levitsky and Way consider indicative of non-competitive elections.²⁷ Furthermore, the central role of the media in fostering competition in the electoral period indicates a relatively independent media. There were also no major instances of fraud or voter coercion. That the electoral process fostered such a high level of competition indicates that the elections were more than a democratic facade obscuring an authoritarian reality.

While the elections were widely regarded as free, fair and open, Kabila used various methods, including the manipulation of state resources, to tip the electoral balance in his favour. On the day of the Presidential runoff the Presidential guard was used by Kabila to attack the private television channels owned by Bemba. Kabila was clearly willing to use violence to undermine the independence of the press, in an attempt to improve his own position *vis-à-vis* Bemba. While Kabila used violent and undemocratic methods to improve his own position, meaningful competition ensued to the extent that it was not inconceivable that Bemba would win.

Elections are important moments in which citizens can exert influence over the ruling elite, yet in democratic systems they must be reinforced by strong democratic institutions, effective opposition and active citizen participation in the inter-election period. This section will now analyse whether the media, legislature and the judiciary fostered meaningful opposition to the government in the post-election period. In doing so it will examine how the Kabila regime, the first government after the transition period, has evolved since the election.

A diverse and independent media is well established as a cornerstone of the Congolese political tradition. The media represents a powerful mechanism through which discontent with the regime is expressed. However, the Kabila regime has increasingly worked to infringe upon this arena of democratic contestation. Intimidation and arrest have been used to hinder criticism of the Kabila regime; there are also a number of cases of assault, murder and threats of rape. Unlike the media in authoritarian regimes, the Congolese media is a powerful mechanism for the

²⁶ Federico Borello, 'A First Few Steps: The Long Road to a Just Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', *International Centre for Transitional Justice Occasional Paper Series*, October 2004, p.25

²⁷ Levitsky and Way, 'The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism', p.55

expression of dissent. As in competitive authoritarian regimes the media is targeted to such an extent that the regime does not meet the minimal conditions of democracy.

Since Kabila was inaugurated, opposition parties have played little role in politics. This is both a reflection of the nature of political parties in the DRC and of the direct marginalisation of the opposition by the government. Throughout the election period, issue-based campaigning was virtually absent. Having missed out on the spoils of office many highly personalised parties ceased to play an important role in the inter-election period. However, some individuals have used their position within the legislature to express their disapproval of government policy. Elements of the opposition have been threatened, assaulted and, in one widely reported case, murdered. Despite systematic repression, there exists a space in which such views continue to be expressed.

The regime has entrenched the independence of the judiciary in the constitution. Unlike the direct infringement of press freedom, the government works to undermine the independence of the judiciary indirectly through depriving it of adequate funding. While Kabila enjoys ample discretion in the appointment of judges, manipulation of the judiciary is largely unnecessary due to the dearth of power vested in this institution. As a result of the near total lack of funding for the judiciary, it is unlikely to foster meaningful democratic contestation.

The Kabila regime cannot be classified as authoritarian or democratic, but rather it is a hybrid regime situated in the democratic/authoritarian grey-zone. That some arenas, including the legislature, media and electoral system, continue to foster meaningful opposition to the government is evidence that democracy not merely a facade. However, the Kabila regime has worked to restrict this opposition. Due to the repression of opposition actors, the lack of power invested in the judiciary, and the targeting of media freedom, the Kabila regime does not meet the minimal requirement for democracy. The regime clearly fits the conditions of a competitive authoritarian regime: while meaningful competition exists, this is violated to such an extent that the political playing field becomes heavily tilted in favour of the incumbent. This paper will now turn to examine the different domestic and international pressures behind the recent democratisation process.

The Congolese Political Tradition

Since 1885 the DRC has experienced extractive colonialism, short-lived democratic regime under Patrice Lumumba (June - September 1960), 32 years of Mobutu's authoritarian kleptocracy (1965-1997) and four years of Laurent Kabila's authoritarian rule (1997-2001). A brief outline of the Congolese political tradition, with an emphasis on the particularly long and influential Mobutu period, will be followed by an exploration of the effect of this tradition on the present regime. In doing so, this section aims to disentangle the historical roots of democracy, authoritarianism, corruption and patronage in the DRC.

The Democracy Tradition of Corruption and Patronage

Mobutu had a particularly far-reaching influence on the Congolese political tradition, partially due to the length of his rule but also because of the effect of his regime on the Congolese psyche. Under Mobutu a regime was established in which large volumes of state revenue were siphoned off in order to sustain a complex web of

patrimonial networks.²⁸ As a result, state revenue was not reinvested back into the country: in 1982 only 10 percent of the official budget was spent on education and health services; a decade later this had fallen to zero.²⁹ The ruling elite became fixated on remaining in power in order to enjoy the benefits associated with Mobutu's entourage.³⁰ In this period, corruption and patrimonialism became established as socially accepted cornerstones of the Congolese political tradition.

From independence until the mid-1980s the regime profited from high levels of export earnings based on the country's abundant resources. The DRC has rich reserves of timber, diamonds, copper, cobalt, gold, uranium and coltan including approximately one tenth of the world's copper and thirty-five percent of the world's cobalt.³¹ In the post-independence period mining was central to the Congolese economy, accounting for 58 percent of the country's export earnings in 1958.³² Falling copper prices,³³ the increasingly corrupt and inefficient nationalised mining sector,³⁴ and the expansion of the informal mining sector³⁵ led to a significant decrease in state revenue in the late 1980s.

This decrease directly undermined Mobutu's capacity to reward loyalty amongst the vast network of clients. As Mobutu became less able to service this system, unruly strongmen were able to threaten the authority of the central government.³⁶ By the early 1990s the formal economy had ceased to function and the country was in a state of political collapse. The centrality of patronage to the regime is evident in the collapse of the state following a decrease in the resource revenues upon which this patronage system was dependent.

Despite a change in leadership, corruption and patronage continue to pervade the Congolese political system. Patronage is evident in the overrepresentation of those loyal to Kabila among the six deputies of state, 34 ministers and 20 deputy ministers of the cabinet.³⁷ Kabila also replaced the heads of 37 state enterprises with his

²⁸ See Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo: from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History*, London and New York: Zed Books, 2002, p.143.

²⁹ Banque du Zaïre, *Rapport Annuel*, Kinshasa: Banque du Zaïre, 1992.

³⁰ See Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo: from Leopold to Kabila*, p.4.

³¹ Russian Metallurgy and World, 'DRC Strips Mining Licenses; Gives China Mineral Rights', *Mining Journal*, <http://www.rusmet.com/news.php?id=11948>, 06/11/2007, [Accessed: 26/02/2008], p.1; Biopact, 'China 'Opening up' Congo for Minerals, Bioenergy with Massive \$5 Billion Loan', *Biopact Paper*, 2007, <http://biopact.com/2007/09/china-opening-up-congo-for-minerals.html>, 20/09/2007, [Accessed: 02/02/2008], p.2.

³² George Martelli, *Leopold to Lumumba: A History of the Belgian Congo, 1877-1960*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1962, p.19.

³³ The price of copper from \$5 375 in 1970 to US\$2 609 in 1987. Kamwanya Kalala, 'Economic Policy and Agrarian Crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Zaïre from 1960 to 1990', *African Study Monographs*, 11(2): 55-73, 1990, p.64

³⁴ Aust and Jaspers 'From Resource War to 'Violent Peace': Transition in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)', Bonn: Bonn International Centre for Conversion, 2006, p.40.

³⁵ The shift from copper extraction to artisanal mining further undercut the power of the government in the mining sector and reduced state revenue. See Michael Ross, 'Booty Futures: Africa's Civil Wars and the Future Market for Natural Resources', unpublished paper, Department of Political Science, University of California, LA, 18/12/2002, <http://www.polisci.ucla.edu/faculty/ross/bootyfutures.pdf>, [Accessed: 20/09/2008], p.20.

³⁶ William Reno, 'Sovereignty and Personal Rule in Zaïre', *African Studies Quarterly*, 1(3), 1997, p.1

³⁷ Africa Research Bulletin, 'Internal Developments: Democratic Republic of the Congo', *Africa Research Bulletin: Political, Social and Cultural Series*, 44 (2): 16964-16965, March 2007, p.16964 .

'clients', further increasing his economic power and political patronage.³⁸ Complex patronage networks, not party ideology, continue to dictate the allocation of key positions within the administration. As people continue to enter politics in order to access the benefits that accrue to those in power, this cycle continues. This patronage network is interspersed with corruption at all levels of the regime. In 2007 *Transparency International* ranked the DRC 168th out of 179 countries according to the Corruption Perception Index, with a score of 1.9 out of a perfect score of 10, indicating rampant corruption.³⁹

High levels of corruption and patronage have undermined the establishment of transparent, democratic institutions. Rent-seeking ruling elite have actively worked against the formation of strong institutions that may have the capacity to curb this behaviour.⁴⁰ In addition to the absence of requisite political will, these corrupt practices have further undermined the capacity of institutions by depriving them of necessary state revenue.

The Political Tradition of Democracy

Democracy was not a foreign concept in Congolese society. The Mouvement National Congolais under the socialist leadership of Patrice Lumumba won the May 1960 elections, however, by September of the same year the leadership changed through a coup d'état ending the DRC's first experimentation with democracy.

A sustained popular movement also pushed for Congolese democratisation since the early 1980s. In 1980, a 52-page letter was drafted by thirteen members of parliament to Mobutu demanding political reform. Over the next decade this group pushed for democracy under the leadership of Etienne Tshisekedi wa Mulumba despite marginalisation and persecution by the government. During a brief release from prison in 1982 the group members formed the political party the Union pour la Democratie et le Progress Social (UDPS). Despite violating the law banning political parties the new party instantly became popular with the masses.⁴¹

In the early 1990s, the Mobutu regime turned to democracy in an attempt to retain power in the face of state failure. The regime oversaw the legalisation of political parties and launch of the National Sovereign Conference as a forum for inter-Congolese dialogue.⁴² This limited liberalisation of the political system further undermined the highly centralised system of patronage. Mobutu quickly aborted the democratisation process and managed to remain President for the next four years. In November 1996, a trilateral alliance comprised of Angola, Rwanda and Uganda invaded the DRC sparking the First Civil War.

While democracy is historically and culturally rooted in the DRC, the recent democratisation in the post-conflict period has not incorporated this strong

³⁸ Africa Confidential, 'Congo Kinshasa: Kabila's Men, Kabila's Jobs', *Africa Confidential*, 49 (3): 8-9, 2008, p.8.

³⁹ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2007*, 2007, available online at http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2007, [Accessed: 10/06/2008].

⁴⁰ See Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo: from Leopold to Kabila*.

⁴¹ Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo: From Leopold to Kabila*, p.185

⁴² Federico Borello, 'A First Few Steps: The Long Road to a Just Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', *International Centre for Transitional Justice Occasional Paper Series*, October 2004, p.vii

foundation. The key belligerents in the Second Civil War were made vice-presidents in the power-sharing transition government; meanwhile the democratic movement, which was not privy to either civil war, was excluded.⁴³ In the lead-up to the elections, Tshisekedi called for a registration boycott as he tried to negotiate a late registration of voters. When reopening the registration was ruled out Tshisekedi returned to his position of boycott.⁴⁴ As a result the democratic movement has not been incorporated into post-conflict democratic reform. Tshisekedi remains a powerful, and immensely popular, figure in Congolese politics.

Despite the apparent success of the elections, there is not a lot of popular support for the current regime. The view that the election was a farce arranged to legitimise the internationally-backed Kabila is widespread throughout Congolese society from the highest Catholic Church authorities and Congolese intellectuals to the vast bulk of the Congolese Diaspora.⁴⁵ This may be due, in part, to the exclusion of the democratic movement, but also to the corruption, patrimonialism and repression of the government. While there is a well-established Congolese democratic movement, the present regime does not key into this support. When combined with the lack of popular support for the regime the lack of inclusion of the democratic movement makes democracy in the DRC is somewhat hollow and, as a result, fragile.

It was only when the state was on the verge of total collapse that the Mobutu regime attempted to provide a minimal façade of democracy. While there was a strong and popular democratic movement in the DRC this was marginalised throughout the Mobutu period. Although there is a strong historically-rooted democratic movement in the DRC, this has been sidelined in the transition period and electoral process, thereby depriving the Kabila regime of a solid foundation of popular domestic legitimacy.

The political tradition of the Congolese leadership is one of authoritarianism and corrupt patronage networks, not of populism or democratic rule. This section has shown that while the patronage, corruption and authoritarianism of the present regime have strong connections to the Congolese political tradition, there is minimal linkage between the post-conflict democratic reform and the Congolese democratic movement.

Foreign aid and Democratic Conditionalities

The previous section has shown that the democratic element of Congolese competitive authoritarianism is not based on domestic pressure; this section will now examine the role of external factors, particularly democratically conditional foreign aid, in the recent democratic reform. Accordingly this section will firstly present a brief outline of foreign involvement in the post-conflict DRC before analysing how this has affected the political persuasion of the regime.

International, particularly western, actors have provided immense support to post-conflict security and economic reconstruction, and the election process. While the US,

⁴³ BBC World Service, 'Kabila says Tshisekedi to stay out of politics', *BBC World Service*, 18/02/1998, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/57669.stm>, [Accessed: 31/05/2008], p.1

⁴⁴ Africa Confidential, 'Congo-Kinshasa: Two Elections, One Country', *Africa Confidential*, 47 (16): 1, 2006, p.1

⁴⁵ Weiss, 'Voting for Change in the DRC', 2007, p.141

the international financial institutions and a number of private donors have been important, the UN and the EU have had the greatest involvement.⁴⁶ These donors have overseen an influx of high levels of foreign aid since the end of the Second Civil War in 2002. Countries with Official Development Aid (ODA) to GDP ratios exceeding 10 percent are classified as having a high dependence on foreign aid.⁴⁷ In 2005 the ODA to GDP ratio in the DRC was 25.7 percent.⁴⁸ Conservative estimates put the amount of foreign assistance in the period between 2002 and 2006 at US\$10 billion.⁴⁹

Since the 1980s, conditionalities have become an important precondition for mobilising development assistance. Foreign assistance from western donors is targeted at establishing governments and administrative structures that are based on a distinctly liberal democratic model.⁵⁰ In the DRC such conditionalities have been utilised to press for the establishment of representative liberal democracy and capitalist economic structures, with the UK alone providing £35.9 million towards the electoral process.⁵¹

After more than ten years of state collapse, the Congolese administration lacked the political and economic capacity to govern the country effectively or finance the necessary reconstruction. Assistance provided by foreign donors has been crucial for conducting democratic elections, building infrastructure and stabilising the economy, in addition to financing the activities of the state. Due to immense international support, these goals have been met with a moderate level of success.⁵²

Without this support, it is unlikely that the government would be able to ensure the territorial integrity of the country, let alone navigate the complexities of post-conflict economic reconstruction.

Economic and security support has been offered on the condition of democratic reform including the holding of elections. As a consequence the DRC has changed its outward political and economic image by promising market liberalisation and democratic reform. In 2005 the Kabila administration signed up to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) which promotes transparency and good governance in the extractive industries. Representing a coalition of governments, companies, civil society groups, investors and international organisations, this initiative provides a framework which the Congolese government can use to increase transparency in the mining sector.⁵³

⁴⁶ Christopher S. Chivvis, 'Preserving Hope in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 49 (2): 21-41, 2007, p.25-6.

⁴⁷ Elsabe Loots, 'Aid and Development in Africa: The Debate, the Challenges and the Way Forward', *South African Journal of Economics*, 74(3): 363-381, 2006, p.366.

⁴⁸ World Bank, *African Development Indicators 2007*, Washington: World Bank, 2008, p.101.

⁴⁹ Jason Stearns and Michela Wrong, 'Struggle for a Functioning Congo', *Financial Times*, 4/08/2006, available online at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4315>, [Accessed: 26/05/2008].

⁵⁰ Aust and Jaspers, 'From Resource War to 'Violent Peace'', p.25.

⁵¹ Department for International Development, 'DRC's Historic Elections', *Country Profiles*, 25/08/2008, available online at <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/africa/drc-voting.asp>, [Accessed: 26/09/2008], p.1.

⁵² IMF, *Global Economic Outlook*, Washington, DC: IMF, 2006.

⁵³ For more information see Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, available online at <http://eitransparency.org/>, [Accessed: 26/09/2008]

However, western actors in the DRC have, at times, emphasised elections at the expense of the establishment of strong democratic institutions. The EITI and other transparency initiatives were not emphasised by international donors during the transition period due to a fear that they would derail the electoral process.⁵⁴ Thus while the Kabila government has signed the EITI initiative, it has not been implemented to date.⁵⁵ Without this pressure, there is little incentive for the ruling elite which benefit from patronage and corruption to implement anti-corruption measures. International actors have pushed for elections at the expense of structural reform that targets corruption and patrimonialism.

Villalon and Von Doepp argued that democratisation can only be established and endure when “the interests and calculations of the key players stimulate them to work within or comply with the system, rather than to subvert it.”⁵⁶ This provides some insight into why the Congolese ruling elite have been so willing to accept democratically conditional foreign aid, but also why donors have not confronted corruption and patrimonialism.

The large sums associated with foreign aid in the DRC provide opportunities for corruption. Meanwhile the plethora of aid-projects “provide for the allocation of all sorts of discretionary goods to be politicised and patrimonialised.”⁵⁷ Foreign aid represents a large inflow of capital that supports the corruption and patronage embedded in the regime. Endemic corruption and patronage is part of the reason that the regime has been so willing to accept democratic reform. A pragmatic approach suggests that despite patronage and corruption, or possibly even due to it, foreign aid has provided an incentive for democratic reform. It has also created creates stability by introducing a form of revenue that the rent-seeking elite can access through non-violent measures. However, democratisation on this basis necessitates the continuation of high levels of foreign aid and it is therefore not an option for long-term political reform.

Aid conditionalities have promoted democratisation in the DRC with varying degrees of success. Post-conflict democratisation can largely be accounted for by the pressure applied by and incentives attached to foreign aid. However, high levels of foreign aid have also undermined the establishment of strong democratic institutions by drawing human resources away from the administration and undermining the establishment of a strong taxation system. The budgeting problems facing the administration have been compounded by the volatility of foreign aid flows.

⁵⁴Muzong W. Kodi, ‘Anti-Corruption Challenges in Post-Election Democratic Republic of Congo’, *Chatham House: An Africa Programme Report*, January 2007, http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/3388_drc0107.pdf, [Accessed: 12/02/2008], p.v.

⁵⁵ World Bank, ‘Main Discussion Paper’, Consultative Group for the Democratic Republic of Congo, Paris: World Bank Press, 29.11.2007, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CONGODEMOCRATICEXTN/Resources/Main_discuss_En.pdf, [Accessed: 14.02.2008], p.iii.

⁵⁶ Leonardo Villalon and Peter VonDoepp, ‘Elites, Institutions, and the Varied Trajectories of Africa’s Third Wave Democracies’, in Leonard A. Villalon and Peter VonDoepp (eds.), *The Fate of Africa’s Democratic Experiments: Elites and Institutions*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005, p.16

⁵⁷ T. Moss, G Pettersson and N Wan Der Walle, ‘An Aid-Institutions Paradox? A Review Essay on Aid Dependency and State Building in Sub-Saharan Africa’, *Centre for Global Development*, Working Paper 74, January 2006, p.9.

Overseeing the vast number of aid projects operating in the DRC has placed a considerable burden on weak Congolese institutions, drawing human resources away from other state functions. The high salaries and side benefits offered by donor projects and NGOs, versus the relatively low salaries available through the administration, draw qualified public officials away from the government sector.⁵⁸ By ‘crowding out’ the most qualified personnel from the administration, foreign aid has undermined the development of strong institutions.

The large volume of foreign aid in the post-conflict period has reduced the need for the Congolese government to tax the citizenry. Yet such taxation is considered central to building the capacity of institutions.⁵⁹ When citizens surrender part of their earnings to the state, there is a greater incentive for that state to create an effective and honest bureaucracy in order to encourage compliance.⁶⁰ Foreign aid acts as a “substitute for domestic revenue mobilisation whilst allowing the same level of expenditure”.⁶¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that in the post-conflict period with high levels of foreign aid there has not been a concerted effort to create an effective taxation system and the capacity building of democratic institutions that this requires.

The volatility of foreign aid, combined with the high level of Congolese aid dependence, has undermined the ability of the Congolese government to budget effectively. Foreign aid flows are dependent on funds from donor countries and international financial institutions whose priorities are vulnerable to domestic and international considerations; as a result, foreign aid inflows can be difficult to predict. The tendency of donors to overestimate the quantity of future aid disbursements augments this problem.⁶² The problems of future aid uncertainty were underscored in the first budget of the new government. Passed in 2007, it outlined spending worth US\$2.4 billion, this was based on the unfounded assumption that international donors would fund more than half the budget.⁶³

The post-conflict period has seen the DRC improve politically and economically with the support of foreign donors. Foreign aid has promoted democratic reform in the DRC and lent strong support to the electoral process. By establishing opportunities for corruption and patronage, western foreign aid has provided an incentive for the Congolese ruling elite to accept democratic reform. The government does not appear to have any commitment to democracy beyond this. At the same time foreign aid has actually undermined the establishment of strong democratic institutions in the DRC. Because democratic reform is based on aid-linked pressure from foreign governments rather than groundswell popular support, the regime is vulnerable to authoritarian drift.

⁵⁸ Moss, et al., ‘An Aid-Institutions Paradox?’ p.8.

⁵⁹ Moss, et al., ‘An Aid-Institutions Paradox?’ p.10.

⁶⁰ M. Moore and G. Harrison, ‘The Development of Political Underdevelopment’, *Global Encounters: International Political Economy, Development and Globalization* Palgrave, London, 2005, p.30.

⁶¹ Moss, et al., ‘An Aid-Institutions Paradox?’ p.11.

⁶² Mark McGillvray, and O. Morrissey, ‘Aid Illusion and Public Sector Behaviour’, *Journal of Development Studies*, 36(6): 118-136, 2001.

⁶³ Africa Confidential, ‘Congo-Kinshasa: More Fighting, More Aid’, *Africa Confidential*, 48 (18): 1, 2007, p.1.

Chinese Investment and the Competitive Authoritarian Continuum

Levitsky and Way note that a vast spectrum of regimes fall under the competitive authoritarian umbrella: from the relatively competitive and transparent political systems such as Botswana to Mugabe's Zimbabwe in which elections represent a narrow opening for democratic competition. Given the wide range of regimes that fall under this hybrid regime sub-type, a regime may shift significantly within the conceptual bounds of competitive authoritarianism. In the DRC the regime may shift in a democratic or an authoritarian direction while still remaining competitive authoritarian. This paper will now explore two sources of pressure, a decrease in democratically conditional foreign aid and an increase in politically unconditional Chinese investment, which might push the regime in a more authoritarian direction.

The DRC has been dependent on foreign aid inflows to reconstruct the country to a level of functionality. Kabila announced in 2007 that US\$14 billion would be needed over the next five years to rebuild the economy, reduce poverty and improve the country's infrastructure. It is estimated that half of this money would have to come from international donors.⁶⁴ While donors have pledged US\$4 billion over the next four years,⁶⁵ foreign aid is characterised by an over-estimation of future flows.

With the success of the democratic elections in 2006, the DRC is no longer classified as 'emerging from conflict'. For the purposes of the international financial institutions, it is now considered a normal least-developed country (LDC).⁶⁶ The government must observe normal standards of governance and government expenditure in order to continue to receive similar levels of financial support. The current administration falls far short of these standards. As a result there is likely to be a decrease in foreign aid over the next few years.

A decrease in foreign aid would mean that there is less incentive for the regime to strengthen and expand democratic reform. In other words, if democratically conditional foreign aid ceases to become a lucrative endeavour for the ruling elite, there is less likelihood that the government will undertake democratisation. This is particularly relevant to the DRC where the recent democratisation is heavily based on foreign aid as opposed to wide popular support.

Against a backdrop of uncertain foreign aid inflows, the Kabila regime has entered into a structured mining project with a group of Chinese enterprises worth \$US9.25 billion. On 22 April 2008 China Railway Group Limited and Sinohydro entered into the Sicominex deal with the Congolese government.⁶⁷ Under the deal the Chinese enterprises will undertake extensive infrastructure works which will be guaranteed and financed through revenues from a joint mining venture. The mining venture

⁶⁴ Rights and Accountability in Development, 'DRC: Key Mining Contacts in Katanga, the Economic Argument for Renegotiation', *RAIDS Paper*, April 2007, available online at <http://ratcliffphotots.free.fr/kamoto/raidreportapril2007/raid.htm>, [Accessed: 16/07/2008], p.2.

⁶⁵ World Bank, 'Donors pledge US\$4 billion for DR Congo's development', *News Release No. 2008/XXX/AFRVP*, 30/11/2007, p.1.

⁶⁶ Africa Confidential, 'More Fighting, More Aid', p.3.

⁶⁷ Lumbi, Pierre: Minister of Infrastructure and Public Works, 'Contribution by the Minister on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Accords Signed Between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the People's Republic of China', *Address to the National Assembly of the DRC*, 09/05/2008, <http://www.infomine.com/publications/docs/Lumbi2008.pdf>, [Accessed: 08/08/2008], p.5.

covers a number of copper and cobalt concessions in the province of Katanga.⁶⁸ The current value of the mines' is estimated at US\$80-85 billion,⁶⁹ containing an estimated "10.6 million tonnes of copper (about 70% of world annual production) and 629, 000 tonnes of cobalt (more than 10 years of global annual production)."⁷⁰ The Chinese enterprises will take a 68 percent share in the venture while the Congolese parastatal⁷¹ Gecamines⁷² will retain 32 percent.⁷³

The proceeds from the mining deal will be used to finance a number of infrastructure projects across the country. The deal involves the upgrade, modernisation and construction of 3,215 kilometres of railway on the Ilebo-Lubumbashi line linking Katanga with the province of Bas-Congo,⁷⁴ in addition to 3,900 kilometres of asphalt and 2,738 kilometres beaten earth road work projects across the country.⁷⁵ Addressing the five development priorities (water, electricity, education, health and transport) outlined by the government's five-year plan,⁷⁶ the agreement also undertakes to build 32 hospitals, 145 health centres, two hydroelectric dams, 5,000 houses, two universities, two vocational training centres, and upgrade two airports (Goma and Bukavu) and two electricity distribution grids (Kinshasa and Lubumbashi).⁷⁷

This Sicominex deal is in-line with a distinctive Chinese approach to investment that has emerged in infrastructure and mining projects across Africa. This approach is characterised by economic assistance, tailored investment projects, and the deliberate decoupling of investment and politics. According to the Chinese government, this is a model that takes the aspirations of developing states seriously while respecting sovereignty and political non-interference.⁷⁸ The Chinese government has expressed a willingness to work with any state regardless of its international standing, including governments that the West has tried to isolate for failing to promote democracy or respect human rights including the Sudan, Zimbabwe and Myanmar.⁷⁹

⁶⁸ See African Research Bulletin, 'DR Congo-China: Mega-Contract Terms Revised', *African Research Bulletin: Economic, Financial and Technical Series*, 45 (5): 17840, 09/07/2008, p.17840.

⁶⁹ This price is current as of July 2008, see African Research Bulletin, 'DR Congo-China', p.17840.

⁷⁰ African Research Bulletin, 'DR Congo-China', p.17840.

⁷¹ Parastatals are semi-autonomous and quasi-governmental enterprises. They fall between state-owned-enterprises and private sector enterprises. In the DRC parastatals are typically wholly owned by the government, however, unlike SOEs parastatals have their own board of directors who are distinct from but still under the authority of the government.

⁷² Societe Generale Congolaise des Minerals; subsequently GECAMINES, Societe Generale des carriers et mines du Zaire.

⁷³ Lumbi, *Address to the National Assembly*, p.3.

⁷⁴ Martyn Davies, 'How China delivers Development Assistance to Africa', *Centre for Chinese Studies, University of Stellenbosch*, University of Stellenbosch Press: February 2008, p.53.

⁷⁵ Lumbi, *Address to the National Assembly*, p.4.

⁷⁶ John Vandaele, 'Africa: China Outdoes Europeans in Congo', *All Africa*, 08/02/2008, available online at <http://allafrica.com/stories/0200802090006.html>, [Accessed: 15/10/2008]; and US Department of State, 'Background Note: Democratic Republic of the Congo', *Bureau of African Affairs*, 10/2008, available online at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2823.htm>, [Accessed: 15/10/2008].

⁷⁷ Lumbi, *Address to the National Assembly*, p.4.

⁷⁸ Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, 'Friends and Interests: China's Distinctive Links with Africa', *African Studies Review*, 50 (3): 75-115, 2007, p.78.

⁷⁹ David Zweig and Bi Jianhai, 'China's Global Hunt for Energy', *Foreign Affairs*, 84 (5): 25-32, Sept-Oct 2005, p.28.

Regime legitimacy in the DRC, and generally throughout Africa, is heavily dependent on economic performance. Nigerian scholar Claude Ake contends that “ordinary Africans do not separate political democracy from economic democracy or for that matter from economic well-being.”⁸⁰ In other words, the population is likely to withdraw support for democracy if it fails to provide collective economic improvement. In the one hand, if the foreign aid and the economic benefits that it provides decrease, the Congolese citizenry may withdraw their support for the democratisation process. On the other hand, if the Chinese investment results in tangible collective benefits it may bolster popular support for the regime despite the lack of democratic conditionalities. The Sicomines represents an opportunity for the DRC to break with its long-running tradition of under-development and translate its resources into economic growth. Due to the vested interests of the Chinese enterprises, there is a strong likelihood that the infrastructure projects outlined by the deal will materialise.

By channelling the proceeds of the mining venture directly into infrastructure projects, to be managed and overseen by the Chinese enterprises, the structured nature of the Sicomines deal limits opportunities for corruption. However, just as the Chinese government does not try to impose economic and political conditions on developing countries, it does not require that the rules of transparency and good governance be observed.⁸¹ Indeed, the Sicomines deal has already been characterised by a lack of transparency which has frustrated some Congolese politicians and NGOs.⁸² Information about the Sicomines deal is not readily available from Chinese or Congolese government sources. There is a near total lack of transparency regarding the Sicomines deal from Chinese government English language sources. Hubbard argues that while open Chinese language sources generally contain more information, they are also far from comprehensive.⁸³ Most of the information used by this paper about the Sicomines deal comes from a published address by the Minister of Infrastructure and Public Works to the Congolese General Assembly⁸⁴ and English language media sources.

In the past, western foreign aid has represented a lucrative source of revenue. In order to access this foreign aid, the Congolese regime has been willing to accept the associated democratic reform. However, politically unconditional Chinese investment is beginning to challenge the monopoly over foreign influence and investment that western donors held in the post-conflict period. A decrease in western aid *vis-à-vis* an increase in politically unconditional Chinese investment is likely to push the DRC in a more authoritarian direction. The relatively independent media and oppositional elements may protest such a shift. However, if the regime fosters economic growth it may foster popular support regardless. The Kabila regime may shift in an authoritarian direction; however, it is likely to remain within the conceptual bounds of

⁸⁰ Claude Ake, ‘The Unique Case of African Democracy’, *International Affairs*, 69 (2): 239-244, 1993, p.241.

⁸¹ Valerie Niquet, ‘China’s African Strategy’, *Politique Etrangere*, 2006, available online at <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/0805-Niquet-ANG.pdf>, [Accessed: 10/09/2008], p.6.

⁸² Global Witness, ‘NGOs fear that DRC mining review process has been hijacked’, *Media Library*, http://www.globalwitness.org/media_library_detail.php/626/en/ngos_fear_that_drc_mining_contract_review_process_has_been_hijacked_, 04/02/2008, [Accessed: 10.02.2008].

⁸³ Paul Hubbard, ‘Aiding Transparency: What We Can Learn About China Exim Bank’s Concessional Loans’, *Centre for Global Development Working Paper*, No.126, September 2007, p.8.

⁸⁴ Lumbi, *Address to the National Assembly of the DRC*, p.5.

competitive authoritarianism. In the current international milieu authoritarian regimes are difficult to uphold, as a result it is unlikely to become fully authoritarian.

Concluding Remarks

In 2006 the DRC held multiparty elections for the first time in over forty years. While elections are an important component of democracy, free and fair elections alone do not constitute democracy. In the DRC the legislature, media and electoral arena foster meaningful democratic contestation. However, the Kabila regime has systematically violated this competition to such an extent that the regime does not meet the minimum conditions of modern democracy. The interaction between the government and democratic competition in the DRC clearly establishes the regime as competitive authoritarian.

Established as a core pillar of the Congolese political tradition in the Mobutu period, corruption and patronage remain entrenched at every level of the administration. While the post-conflict influx of foreign aid has spurred much needed post-conflict reconstruction, it has also fed into corruption and patronage networks. The ruling elite accepted democratic reform linked to foreign aid insofar as it did not represent a significant challenge to this system.

Post-conflict democratisation in the DRC has not incorporated the well-established democratic movement; rather this reform has been based on pressure from western donors applied through politically conditional foreign aid. As a result the regime is particularly vulnerable to authoritarian drift within the conceptual bounds of competitive authoritarianism. The recent increase in politically unconditional Chinese investment is likely to push the regime in a more authoritarian direction particularly if combined with a decrease in politically conditional foreign aid.

This study is not an abstract academic enquiry. The political and economic trajectory of the DRC will have very real implications for the Congolese people. It will also have repercussions for sub-Saharan Africa collectively. The United Nations has claimed that the DRC has the size, location, political and economic potential to “provide added value to virtually the entire African continent”.⁸⁵ It is vital, therefore, that we have a strong understanding of Congolese regime form, and the influence of western foreign aid and Chinese investment.

⁸⁵MONUC, ‘DRC Context’, *MONUC Online*, 2006, available online at <http://www.monuc.org/news.aspx?newsID=11432>, [Accessed: 01/08/2008].

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